






Bensoniana



Cornishiana



Stonebrough Books



BENSONIANA
AND
CORNISHIANA

BENSONIANA
CORNISHIANA

BENSONIANA

From two Notebooks
of A. C. Benson
Selected by J. A. Gere



CORNISHIANA

Sayings of Mrs Cornish
Mostly collected
by Logan Pearsall Smith



SETTRINGTON
STONE TROUGH BOOKS

1999

650 copies printed

Published by Stone Trough Books
The Old Rectory
Settrington, York YO17 8NP

Extracts from A. C. Benson's notebooks
copyright © The Master and Fellows
of Magdalene College, Cambridge, 1999

Introductions © copyright
Stone Trough Books, 1999

All rights reserved

ISBN 0 9529534 7 1

Printed and bound by Smith Settle, Otley, West Yorkshire

CONTENTS

Bensoniana	<i>page</i> 11
------------	----------------

Cornishiana	47
-------------	----

ILLUSTRATIONS

A. C. Benson	8
--------------	---

Blanche Warre-Cornish	42
-----------------------	----

BENSONIANA



A. C. BENSON (1911)

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

ARTHUR CHRISTOPHER BENSON (1862-1925), son of the Archbishop and brother of the novelists E. F. Benson and Monsignor R. H. Benson, was an inspirational master at Eton (where he was offered the headmastership), prolific author, co-editor of *Queen Victoria's Letters*, and finally the beneficent Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge. But his most remarkable legacy was a diary of some five million words which occupies 180 manuscript volumes. Two selections from this have appeared, arousing hopes of fuller publication.

Benson wrote compulsively and with astonishing ease. In addition to his diary—in the words of a distinguished protégé, Geoffrey Madan—‘two volumes, sturdily bound, lay always in easy reach into which he would insert day by day a cutting from the Press, or a scrap from an illustrated paper, or simply a pointed quotation . . . and he would quarry in them to find an apt illustration for a lecture, or a Parthian shot for a correspondent. In their crowded jumble and their flickering sequence they make a vivid cinematic record: they escape the extension of a continuous theme; and there passes reflected in them much of what their author truly enjoyed and approved, with more, perhaps, of what he did not.’

The notebooks, called ‘Subjects’ (1910) and ‘Extracts’ (1923), came into Madan’s possession and were then given by his widow to John Gere, who in turn bequeathed them to Magdalene.

It was Geoffrey Madan’s contention that—except in his biographical studies—Benson excluded from his books three quarters of his real attachment to life. His friends had difficulty in associating the man they knew with those avuncular essays and undemanding novels. In reality he had ‘a perfect sense of humour’ and ‘seemed to swallow what was before him into his vision, swiftly and silently, like a man too

hungry to lose a moment.' Benson the conversationalist, the observer, the pen-portraitist, the matchless companion is found in these notebooks.

J. A. Gere, co-editor with John Sparrow of the renowned *Geoffrey Madan's Notebooks* (1981), a book which owes much to Benson's example, has selected about a sixth of the entries in 'Subjects' and 'Extracts', omitting long quotations. From the 'crowded jumble', a connoisseur's choice has been made.

BENSONIANA

THE OLD COMPANY DIRECTOR who wanted me to write his life, offered me £300. I was to study his letters and diaries and read his writings (he sent me a lot of pamphlets which consisted of his speeches to Boards of Shareholders) & pay him long visits, to question him about his experiences and listen to his reflections. I declined, and he offered me £500, saying that he had surveyed the field of literature and thought that I wrote the clearest style. I refused again, and his daughter wrote to say that if I knew how much the old man had felt it I should not persist in my refusal. He did not wish it done out of any motives of vanity, but because he felt that his example and experience would be of great service to the world.

Mr Birrell. 'If it had been a revolution, I should have expected it to begin earlier.'

Judge. 'A revolution ought to begin immediately after breakfast?'

'Isn't J. very vain?' 'Thompson: 'His enemies say so, and I believe that his friends agree with them.'

Manning's diaries always written as though he were defending himself, on the Day of Judgment, before a hostile jury.

Dunton lunched at a restaurant with a friend. The next day the old waiter said 'that was a loudish gent you was a-lunching with yesterday. I thought once or twice you was a-coming to blows.' It was William Morris talking about Shakespeare!

'Jebb?

HJ [Henry James] of Dickens: 'a merciless military eye.'

HJ of writing: 'ah yes, how jollily the little figures dance under the circle of the lamp, until *Goodbye*—and off they go to take their chance of the dark.'

Ld Kinross, very amiable, said to a friend that he had found such a delightful man in the Cabinet, such a *friend*, Fowler by name (Lord Wolverhampton). 'Why!' said the friend, 'how can you say that? I have always regarded F. as a pestilent fellow and infernal cad.' 'If he *has* a fault,' said K, 'I must admit that it lies in that direction.'

Tennyson, on Sir H. Taylor's face: 'He has the mouth of a fish.'

Cornish, after hearing Edward Lyttelton talk, to M.R.J. 'Doesn't it remind you of a dog chasing larks?'

The curious *gestures* of clock-hands at different hours.

Without irony, the world would be like a wood without birds.
Anatole France

Westminster Abbey in places looks like the yard of a mad stonemason.

Inge

The philosopher and the hens which hurried to be fed. 'I am a match for any one of these little creatures alone, but if they made a combined attack on us, and their attitude is very menacing, they might do us a serious injury.'

P. Lubbock on *Cecilia Randolph*¹: 'Quite a nice little problem.'

Add a volume at the beginning.

All the incidents must go—too hackneyed.

Book lacking in incident.

Descriptions to be omitted.

Scenes to be more clearly described.

Conversations want breaking up.

Hugh should appear earlier—or later.

Names want revising.

Quite worth rewriting if at the end it is thrown into the wastepaper basket.

Things to be *shown* more, not so much *told*.

William Sidgwick describing J.M.W.² as 'boiling down as little religion as he was forced for the sake of an income to profess, with as much science as he could understand, into an unsavoury jelly.'

Gaselee's diary, with the elaborate account-book, etc. His only entry, on Jan. 1. 'Got up at quarter to eight.'

Mr Duckworth (a parson) and the Vicar of Paignton who said that the people who lived at P. were mostly *retired* people, with nothing much to do; said he had a daily Eucharist with an attendance of fifty. 'An attendance of *fifty* at Daily Eucharist!' said Mr D. 'They must indeed have very little to do!'

¹ Not published.

² Canon James Maurice Wilson (1836-1931), Fellow of St John's College, Cambridge, and later headmaster of Clifton. His published works include *Essays and Addresses: an Attempt to treat some Religious Questions in a Scientific Spirit* (1887) and *Two Sermons on the Mutual Influences of Science and Theology* (1899).

SHADES OF TOLERANCE

Peel: 'You like a sweet at lunch. Dear dear what a pity, I haven't ordered one, I never have one myself.'

G: 'I don't like sweets at lunch, and you won't get them at my table.'

P: 'I don't like sweets at lunch, and I really can't now lunch with anyone who has them.'

S: 'I don't like &c, &c. and I must ask the Bursar to forbid the kitchen to send them out to undergraduates.'

R: 'I don't like &c, &c. and please understand Hotson that the undergraduates are not to have them out of my kitchen.'

*

35 Victoria. Cap. 8 allows lunatic or person of unsound mind to hold deanery or canonry so long as it is annexed to headship of a college or professorship of any university.

Sheep eating as if they were in a Refreshment Room and catching a train.

The dinner in town, full of what Tennyson calls 'old knights.'

O.W. speaking of A.D.: 'No motives—only appetites.'

Unhappiness often like a headache.

The voluble civil man: 'Tell me! I should like to hear it—I should like to hear you tell it very much; there is nothing I should enjoy more. Yes, I may have heard it, but that makes no difference. I should like to hear *you* tell it—do not tantalise me . . . Excellent!—very good indeed, a very good story and well told. Yes, I had heard it before but I had forgotten it and it was a treat for me to hear you tell it. Let me hear it again. I

must fix that story in my mind, it is excellent. Pray oblige me with it again.'

Not to be bullied in friendship by 'Loyalty'. Can't live in the past — 'Let the dead' . . . But *I* don't forget' — that's the misery, that two people don't forget the same things — but it's useless to pretend to remember.

Aristocratic and Bourgeois

The man in the picture with the bâton *pointing*—indicating that someone else is to do something. ('If somebody'll go to his head' etc.)

P. Lubbock sauntering into a restaurant hat on head and saying 'Amuse me, bring me things.' Bourgeois humble and professional.

Percy accused me of scepticism, said one must have assumptions—(that's the worst of Percy, his views change but he's always *right*). When I said *he* had been sceptical he said 'Yes, *j'ai passé par là*.'

Don. 'I found some interesting things in the B. Mus. the other day. Libraries are very curious—one can always *discover* there—one always finds a book or a paper— something.'

H. J. 'It would be a much more curious library surely in which one did not find anything—either a book or a paper.'

Don. 'Ah! you mock me.'

Gosse's battered sensibilities. The man who lived on souvenirs—saw many big people once—autographs of refusals and acknowledgments.

All expression is a *want*, a loneliness — to give or claim joy.

NOVEL

1. Philip, a journalist, goes down home—
mother and sister.
2. The first evening a squabble.
3. Talks it over with mother & puts it right.
4. Mother dies.
5. Parson's daughter comes in—plain, affectionate.
6. Talk with sister after funeral arrangements.
7. A time of solitary brooding.
8. Proposes—is refused indignantly.
9. Back to London—Charles Finch.
10. Visit to Gloucestershire.
11. The philosophers and the sham literary man.¹
12. The young artist.
13. Friendship takes him home.
14. The squabble.
15. Writes book—the failure.
16. Back home.
17. The confession.
18. Proposes again, is accepted.

Parson's daughter saying that life, enjoyment, energy, are what mattered and not only the record of it in books. The frame of mind of the 'head-gardener.' Landscape-gardening of art.

Mr Finch suggesting that his book be called 'Entre Nous.'

*

High spirits showing people at their worst.

A 'copy' of Palmerston—three relics of him, a collar, a hair from the left whisker, a toothpick—a caricature in Punch — & some statues of similar statesman.

¹ Against the latter, in another draft: 'Gosse.'

Bachelorhood tends to emphasise both faults and virtues, marriage to modify both.

I was reading Dowden's letters yesterday. He was an enthusiast in his way & I am sure a very trustworthy man: but I felt that if such letters were thought *publishable*, Good God what must ordinary communications be. They seemed so decorous, so snippy, no curve or flourish about them, like a box of dried figs, an awful picture of what being *employed* in literature results in.

The philosopher who described his opponent as a mere 'atmospheric displacement.'

Legends. Curzon on Eton: 'The strange dull distortions.'

Howson and Bp of Norwich—'looking at Boys.'

Aristocrat: P. Lubbock's theory of friends: the people who put a fine edge on one's mind.

'He had come to depend on a certain stimulus and that perhaps not of the highest kind.'

Rev. P. Mac Brayne on Swinburne

Esher's advice: 'Never say where you have been, and never ask for anything unless you are pretty certain to get it.'

Child being taught O.T. History—Golden Calf—'So God was very angry with the Israelites'—'Very *what?*—'Very angry, dear; he was indeed.' 'Why, I should think that most people would have laughed!'

—To Sonnenschein. 'S., I am thinking about matrimony — (pause)—tell me, do you ever find Mrs S's conversation at all *tedious*?'

—To R. Bridges. 'I like your poetry, it contains so many unusual expressions.'

Going down to interview Perceval about leaving Clifton for Trinity: trying to find alleviating circumstances. P. said he was surprised at being selected. 'Ah, my dear P.' said R.E. 'I do not wonder at your surprise, but then we had such a very poor field.'

'You are unmarried, P.' (finding him alone). 'No I am married, but Mrs P. is upstairs today — she is not well.' 'Ah, then *she* is in poor health.'

Consulting everyone whether he need go to his sister's funeral. 'I *have* made up my mind to go; she made the index for my Catullus.'

Jowett to R.E.: 'You always attack the smallest poems of smallest poets.' R.E. relating it: 'The master has such a weakness for great men.'

*

Tonks an outspoken man. Went to inspect & criticise a local exhibition in Manchester. He went round & then met the exhibitors. He leaned on the chimney-piece for a long time and then said, 'the whole thing absolutely sickens me!' Then he went away & took his fee. (W. Nicholson)

The unfortunate man thanked Mr Jonas, the Governor of the gaol, for all his kindness.¹

The days when H.J.'s sentence was a young thing which could run where it liked instead of a delicate creature swathed in relative clauses as an invalid in shawls.

'Life is like a herbaceous border: you sow one thing and another turns up.' (Mrs Cornish)

One forgives people who have never in their lives known what they were doing or where they were going, but who glitter like beautiful fishes. (H. Brewster²)

'It's no use trying to be *clever*—we are all clever here; just try to be *kind*—a little kind.' (Foakes Jackson to young don elected to Jesus)

Clerk told to have a new hymn, but gives out as usual 'All people that &c.' Irate parson: 'D—— all people that on earth do dwell.' Lord Stowell: 'a very compendious anathema.'

'Mere novelties'. Lord Stowell on anything.

American missionary, whose wife was killed in India by the explosion of a powder magazine, put up a tablet in her memory: 'to A— B— who ascended to heaven to meet her Lord in a pillar of smoke, owing to the negligence of a British official.'

¹Cf. 'A little before seven o'clock he was visited by Mr Jonas, the governor of the gaol, to whom he extended his hand, and feelingly thanked him for the kind attention he had received since his incarceration.' Broadsheet of 'The Execution and Confession of Franz Muller, for the murder of Mr Briggs', Nov. 14, 1864 (repr. in D. D. Cooper, *The Lesson of the Scaffold*, Ohio University 1974, p. 24).

²Letter to Ethel Smyth, apropos of Frau von Mockhausen. *As Time Went On*, p. 72.

G. Darwin took up archery — he kept a notebook & analysed all his scores. His point was that the traditional method of scoring is not fair, in respect to the respective areas of coloured rings of the target.

‘Why are the lives of married men longer than those of the unmarried?’ ‘They are not really, they only seem longer.’

Man who told Hume he had tried unsuccessfully to be a philosopher.

H. ‘What books did you read?’

‘Nay nay, I read no books, but I used to sit whole forenoons a-yawning and poking the fire.’

Inge, when a parson uttered an oath, said: ‘I perceive that you are using the language of *an earlier Eschatology*.’

Said that the Prayer Book responses (‘because there is none other &c.’), was like a conversation between two deaf people.

Gilbert Talbot (egotistical) speaking in a Debating Society and saying that the interesting thing about the room in which they met was that it was there that his own convictions were forged and hammered into shape.

Bishop Moorhouse said that he needed alcohol to enable him to digest ‘large masses of solid food’ needed to keep up his strength & do his work efficiently. ‘The Bishop has made in public the humiliating confession that he needs to be drugged before he can perform his work’, said the *Manchester Post*.

E. Austen-Leigh: ‘Warre says the Memorial Hall will have 1001 uses. I wish he would leave the 1000 alone and tell me plainly what the one is.’

Percy's asking only for kindness like D.T. patient who only asks that his friend should hand him brandy.

Lord Salisbury on Sir William Harcourt's Protestantism: 'He has held this language for five and twenty years. *It is too foolish not to be sincere.*'

Cunninghame-Graham at Mrs Parnell's wedding to O'Shea was best man, and almost married her by mistake. In reply to the question 'Wilt thou &c.' he was heard to say 'No! No! No!'

Belloc standing at Elevation (he prefers it). Verger: 'You must kneel or leave the church.' Belloc: 'You go to Hell.'

V: 'I beg your pardon sir. I didn't see you were a Catholic.'

Parnell reading *Alice* earnestly from cover to cover, never smiling, and saying 'A curious book!'

'Newman kinder, almost kind.' Pattison at Littlemore.

M. Arnold describing Dizzy as 'a deathmask, parchment-coloured, immobile, occasionally quoting Disraeli's novels.'

St John confronted with Professor Swete, a polished old gentleman with a princely income, to annotate his visions and say what they mean.

In Pump Room at Bath a small sheet of metal with incised inscription. Read by Professor Sayce as a record of the cure of a Roman lady by the Bath waters, attested by three witnesses—by Professor Zangermeister as a curse on a man for stealing a table cloth—by Prof. Reed as an inscription (monastic) on the death of a lame bell-ringer from ague.

When I was at Dewsbury last week a man there quoted to me a sentence from an old speech of a Lord Lieut. of Yorkshire, which seemed to me very royal: 'This is a larger town than I expected to see, and a more important town than I anticipated. It seems indeed so flourishing a place that in future when I hear the word Progress mentioned I shall think of Dewsbury.'

Solicitor at Odiham, entertaining officers, getting gradually more tipsy to the horror of his nice wife—more & more low & obscene and at last trying to telephone to the General through a wineglass.

Anecdote told by Geoffrey Madan

Victorian novels where hero renounced everything and somehow ended by being made an archdeacon.

The Bp of Marlborough uttering howls of agony & vicious terror about slackers &c. from his comfortable study, like a dog suffering from nightmare in a straw-lined kennel.

What is Furse supposed to be *doing* in England? Is he giving his diocese a holiday from straight talks? Have they sent him away as Artemus Ward said the people of Liverpool did, accompanying him to the steamer, 'Stay away a good time Mr Ward, don't bother to come back'? They are doubtless as tired of him as we are — every day he goes to a bazaar or tea-fight and talks straight. Bishop Buz-Fuz he is called.

Miss T. Ashcroft: 'I believe that E. F. Benson, if he were a Catholic, would write the greatest novel that has ever been written. With his own beautiful charitable outlook on human nature, his humour, and his justice, and Monsignor's

Faith. You see, you can't get *real* drama without the Catholic faith.'

Innocent absurdity of Newman's *Apologia*, as if you could argue yourself out of being an Englishman by an appeal to constitutional history.

F. Newman (bro. of Cardinal) wore three overcoats, the outermost of green shaggy cloth, and the lowest eight inches of trousers lined inside and out with leather, & a large floppy hat, went to Dublin & was followed and hooted by boys. 'They repeatedly asked me,' he said, 'to tell me who my hatter was — and really Nicholson, in the confusion of the moment, I could *not* remember the man's name.'

Curzon, hearing a Duke abused: 'Hold! you arraign my class.'

Siamese twins. Duke of St Albans to keeper, in a hushed whisper: 'Are they brothers?'

Mrs Cameron, of a photograph of Henry Taylor: 'It is monstrous and yet so feeble — it looks like a sea-monster fed on milk.'

J. M. BARRIE

About Kipling: 'If the Germans were to force a landing in England and invade us, where should we find Kipling? *Under the sofa!* He is the most timid man I ever met in my life.'

To Bernard Shaw, after much provocation, at a dinner, when a plate of lentils was brought to S. 'Excuse me, but is that something you are going to eat, or something you have just eaten?'

(Women) 'Those charming and terrible little beings for whom we ruin, dishonour and kill ourselves, and whose sole preoccupation in the midst of this universal carnage is to dress themselves up, sometimes in the form of umbrellas and sometimes of bells.'

*

Parnell. 'I lost that quotation you gave me, and there it was all the time crushed up in my hand. Then I forgot the fellow's name and called him 'the poet'.' Mrs P. 'Well, Shakespeare might perfectly well be called the Poet.'

P. 'Yes? Is that so?'

IN MEMORIAM

Ifey gone away from hubby
Wait a weenie, and I'll come.

*

So that we may sometimes think of
Elizabeth Jane
The beloved wife of Ed^{wd} George Flower
of Lee, Kent.

b. 16 Dec. 1847. d. 23 Oct. 1902.
Laid to rest in dear old Lee cemetery
30 Oct, 1902 in the presence of her
friends, and within the hearing of
the thrush's song.

Funeral card — original sent me by E. Fordham. Mr F re-married in a few months and finally committed suicide.

*

Jowett to Stanley: 'No Dogmas, no Deans.'

The High-School air: mixed timidity & restrained anxiety to say nothing that would jar.

Boyle kicking and lurching (?) at Andrew Lang's door — not personal, but the aggravation of silent dignity.

The urgency with which all Churches appeal for money & the tenacity with which they defend what money they have when there is a question of disendowment show that they consider riches like good, as a *means*.

Crazy woman buying Dr Arnold's DD gown (scarlet) at the Fox How sale—meaning to give it to Rugby. To an enquiry by G. Wordsworth she said she couldn't part with it & was using it as a kimono or tea-gown.

Lord Cranworth always sate in Chancery with two Lord Justices.

Venables: 'Why does Cranny always sit with two L.J.'s?'

Brougham: 'I always put it down to a childish indisposition to be left alone in the dark.'

Dr Clifford at tea-party, after a few remarks about weather, 'And now let us talk of the Lord, and how delightful he is.'

Clifford Allbutt told Jowett he thought of retiring from practical life to get time to read & reflect. 'What a fate for a man to retire from work for contemplation & then discover he had nothing to think about—but perhaps (with a sly look) he would never find it out.'

Spedding's youthful idea of the Almighty was 'Sir Henry Taylor sitting on the sofa in his dressing-gown.'

A fellow of Christ's: 'Our master is intellectually an imbecile, socially a snob, and personally dirty—otherwise unobjectionable.'

Greenhill of St John's: 'Don't go yet—I was just beginning to like you.'

Benj. Kennedy made by his daughters to have a gas ring for early tea, at five in the morning shouting: 'Julia—I can't manage this. I turn the tap repeatedly but nothing results but a singular whistling sound and an insupportable smell.'

W. H. Davies meeting at Lady Cunard's Ambassadors & Ministers, and on being questioned saying: 'They were very pleasant people—I don't know who they were—I think they were just neighbours.'

'What kind of boys go to Heaven?' 'Dead boys.'

Hypocrite: a person who comes to a garden-party with a smile on his face.

Max Beerbohm's parody of *Elinor* (Mrs H. Ward). 'Blue, blue is the Italian sky—white, white shines the Italian villa—but hush, hush; be very careful as you approach the marble threshold. Speak low lest you disturb the inmates. *Everyone* is unwell.'

Tree, at L'pool St: 'A ticket please.' 'Where for?' 'I don't know; do you know of any nice places to go to?' Buying stamps: 'This seems a pretty one, let me have a few of them.'

Joseph Knight (Jowett's secretary) in hope of encouraging J. to be more amiable, laughed aloud at one of his stories. 'You needn't laugh so loud, Knight—you are not my wife.'

French novels chosen by committee of Bishops.

Man treads on another's toe. 'Don't apologise. It's the most sociable thing that ever happened to me here.'

*

People photographed with cigars—why not with a glass & bottle or with a fork with ham on it?

Reid's story of the little American girl whom he saw in a park and smiled at. She looked at him sternly and said 'Momma says I am not allowed to kiss anybody at all.'

Impossible not to feel emotion in the presence of the holder of an ancient barony who yet writes such beautiful English.

Bishop Collins said that when he was at Messina after the earthquake digging up dead bodies, whenever there were *two* together, one was always protecting and helping the other.

'There are certain things—a spider, a ghost, the income-tax, gout, an umbrella for three, that I hate, but a thing that I hate the most is a thing they call the Sea.' (L.C.)

No quality in literature so transitory as exuberance.

Charles I both dishonest and cowardly; he would have been better suited for a clergyman.

H.W. [Hugh Walpole?] meerschäum-coloured under his hair.

The abnormal desire, like a sixth sense—such misery.

T. Hardy. House, bad portraits, second-rate sketches — Mrs Hardy's sketches—dining-room dilapidated, unpainted. Mrs H rather pretty old lady—bonnet— [illegible] & peering (?) & inconsequent. Lunch. Harder than ever to live with.—inflated with his own greatness—beat him (knighthood). Hardy dignified remote talked of concrete things, remote but talkative; the critic 'see first what the man has to *say*.' The little lawns and odd pools and touches of sun. fat niece carpet (??) balsam. Mrs H rambling on as if to herself, grumbling and taking stock talking to herself. Hardy unaffected by a visit—Cockerell the mss—Cat mildly interested in self—but it was *mean*, not large, rather dreary, both discontented.

The horrible pleasure of pleasing inferior people.

R.H.B. shriving dying woman at Kenmare. 'Did she die?' said M.B. when he told her. '*I didn't enquire and I don't know*' said Hugh. This apropos of what Fr Watt calls his urgent and bottomless sympathy.

H.J.'s travel-books written with the excited air of a missionary.

An honorary canon is a clergyman who keeps Jersey cows.

R. Knox introducing a stranger: 'This is Watson — he has been associated with me in most of my cases, and you can speak quite freely before him.'

The surest way of winning political respect is a long immutable, and majestic incapacity.

Sir William Crookes F.R.S. saw a spirit, touched it, named it Katie King, and loved it. Yes, Sir W. lived for six months in

the closest intimacy with a delightful phantom. He maintained intimate tho' most respectful relations with a young person of a mysterious essence who joined to feminine charm the majesty of death.

Dyer [Eton master] on missing an easy putt: 'The sun was in my eyes — and then I have such *light* eyelashes.'

The *thin* minds of H. James' characters.

'All imaginative young men who are sincere with themselves, whatever the colour of their politics, are Tory in their tastes: they delight in distinguished surroundings, leisure, love, pedigree, adventures and good wine.' (Burdett)

The Anglican is tethered—but with a long rope.

The headmaster of my private school was a very kind man — he let me clean his bicycle.

Alfred Austin's transcendental view of women: 'Women love us in spite of our faults, sometimes indeed because of them, don't they Rawnsley? God bless 'em.'

Percival (Bp. of Oxford) after Commission: 'Oxford had as much feeling of unity as a rabbit-warren. Each head of college was seen at the mouth of his burrow; but if anything was suggested, in he dived.'

Gladstone refused on religious grounds to make Matthew Arnold Librarian of the House of Lords.

Lord Dudley in train to angry man who said 'I'll write to the 'Times'! 'Do, and sign it *Jones*.'

Spotted Fly-Catcher's song so small that people thought it had none; but intent listeners would hear little sounds intended for song. Like Cornish saying 'Hip! Hip!' — no sound audible.

Undergraduate trying to make conversation with Jowett, in despair talking about Goethe. Jowett, 'You are conceited.'

Ethel Smyth going to see Maggie Ponsonby, who had just got a new set of front teeth, rising at intervals to come and gaze in her face and say, 'My God, what an improvement!'

Freeman, at S. Marco (Venice), talking much louder and longer than the custodian. As F. went away the custodian pointed at him and said to an English visitor 'Zere goes ze man what *builded* ze Church.'

The awful Lowland Scot face—the long-jawed face which looks as tho' the owner were holding an egg concealed in his mouth—it is what spoils R. L. Stevenson's face.

I had a busy day in town—but having to wait for my lawyer—my appointment being at 3.0 and he being engaged with other clients—I gave him mentally till 3.15 and then simply went away without a word. The letter of apology which followed me to Cambridge was worth the trouble of leaving the business undone! When after this bout I returned to my club, there was Henry James going away in a cab. We shook hands—he said he was going to catch a train, and I had an appointment in a few minutes. He said to me that I looked adventurous. I told him about my flight from my lawyer. He said 'Well, my dear Arthur, I feel I can't at this cloudy and hurried moment, do *justice* to your anecdote. But I will take it with me, I will *reflect* upon it—yes, I will certainly *reflect*—and you may assuredly count on my dis-

covering something to your advantage in it.' He then gave me a sort of benediction—and it is difficult to receive one in the right frame of mind when you feel pretty sure it is going to make you miss your appointment, and then quite certain it is going to lose the beatificer his train.

I lunched with Henry James, who was immensely pontifical. He spoke of Edmund Gosse, and his inability to make friends or keep them. Then he said 'Yet the worst of it is, that in some cloudy corner of that shallow mind, a ghastly conception of possible intimacy seems to lurk.' He said that Gosse had written to him to say that he (G) was much vexed never to receive a signal of interest from H.J. and that all the advances had to be made by him (G), but adding that he nevertheless would ask him to dine &c. H.J. held up his hands in horror and added 'With what hope of arousing an emotion, or in quest of *what* emotion, I can scarcely divine! What preface could be more skilfully adapted to destroy every species of pleasurable anticipation, every prompting of memory and affection?'

Warre made a muddled speech, in the style of St Paul towards the rhetorical close of an Epistle, about the need for reconsiderin' the whole of our system. 'There's a voice without us, the voice of—er—those who criticise all things alike, all systems of education, who don't—er—know anythin' about it; and the voice of—er—jealous porcupines, to whom every improvement is like poison—we mustn't heed them, we mustn't listen to them! But there's a voice within us— the voice of experience and—er—all workin' together for the good of the community, and droppin' those things which divide us from one another—er—that's the spirit in which we must undertake and carry out, and perform what we have to do, and—er—perform it!' It all melted away in a haze of mutterings; and when poor Donaldson got up and

tried to speak on the subject, Warre stopped him almost severely. 'I would rather, on the whole, that the subject were not discussed now. It wants silent and quiet thinkin' about, and considerin', and—er— discussin' alone!' Which means that it is shelved for *this* half at all events. So we go on.

(*Extract from diary, January 1903*)

I must tell you about a dream I had. It was one of my *cere-mony* dreams. I was to walk in a salmon-coloured cope at the end of a long procession of people through the streets; I affected indifference but was hugely pleased, and came out at the tail of the pomp on some steps, and saw it winding away along streets crowded with people. Then I became more and more pleased and excited, and thought it best to walk a little *bowed*, like a student, and then to affect a slight lameness, and then to put on a look of abstraction. I did this for a time with ever-increasing pride, when Luxmoore came up and said in a low harsh voice 'Isn't it kinder to tell an old friend when he is making a real fool of himself?' I then looked quickly round and saw that with my limping and abstraction I had got far behind the procession and that everyone was laughing and giggling. But I was too happy to care, and I said to L 'I don't care what anyone thinks, *I* am enjoying myself.' So I went on limping and being abstracted, but giving my little *runs* at intervals, when people were not looking, I managed to get back into the procession. A little later I sate in a stall, which was so tight that when my turn came to officiate, the men on each side of me had to *pull* me out of it. So it went on, a series of grievous and humiliating fiascos, but none of them taking the edge off my exquisite enjoyment.

Do you think there is *really* any possible comfort in a bereavement, if one really cares about a person, except getting

used to his or her not being alive? I know of none. People talk as if a belief in immortality also meant a certainty of meeting or communicating—which I don't feel anything approaching certainty about. Moreover A cares for B very much, but B does not care at all for A. Yet if they both die people always talk as if A would have a sort of prescriptive right to B's company. If so, the unseen world holds new terrors indeed.

Here's an amusing scrap of Henry James describing Mark Twain's talk: 'He thought, he thought, in fact he seemed to think, he seemed to claim, in a word he *claimed* that all the time at *our* disposal was at *his* disposal.' HJ went on to say that Mark Twain seemed to be thinking aloud: 'He retracted, he emphasised, he withdrew his emphasis, he corrected in public, he revised, he modified the scheme of his sentence, he filched away an adjective, he dabbed on a word . . . it was inconceivable, indecent, pathological!' An *admirable* description of his *own* method of talk!

Henry James on suicide: 'If there is no hurry, no flurry, no indecent hastiness about it, I approve, I applaud, I may say I revere a dignified exit, if made with due deliberation—deliberation that must be the note of the thing!' How entirely unlike anyone else's *method* that is—the slow piling up of effects.

Howard Sturgis said a very pungent thing about Percy lately. He was talking to B. Richmond in the big room at Percy's office, and Percy walked up the room with bundles of papers, and was appealed to as he went by a dozen women-helpers. Some he helped, some he reproved, at some he smilingly shook his head. 'I have always felt,' said Howard, 'that there was something very great about Percy—and I know what it

is now: he has every quality which entitles him to be a *leader of women*.'

There's an article by Percy Lubbock in the last Quarterly on Henry James, in which he seems to me to be blowing loud blasts of helpless glorification on some kind of conch or native hautboy. The style is clotted with Henry James—but whereas H.J.'s epithets do come off like ripe fruit into his hand, Percy's are like fruits long scrambled for on a precipice and ultimately unripe!

Augustus John (anecdote told by William Nicholson) was dining in a restaurant with another long-haired artistic friend, when a tipsy sporting man who had been making a great deal of row with some other guests at another table came up to John and said 'Excuse me, Sir, but have I the pleasure of addressing Burne-Jones?' John promptly knocked him down.

Such a curious old survival today (15 Feb. 1915). In Nicholson's studio in a corner, was painting a man of *incredible* dirtiness, in a very old and long frock-coat, low French collar showing a hairy neck, doubtful trousers, misshapen boots—sunken-eyed, red-nosed, stiff with dirt. He was painting well and quickly. This was an old assistant of Whistler's, long since forgotten and gone to pieces, whom Nicholson with his usual kindness was trying to help. He showed me some of the scarecrow's pictures—very beautiful things indeed! The scarecrow talked the vilest cockney—I never saw such a dilapidated wretch. Warmed with wine, sitting before the fire, his clothes and person exhaling acrid and sickening odours, the poor creature babbled of Whistler and his parties and men long since dead. Kipling could have made a noble story out of it.

Housman entertained us the other day at Trinity with infinite care about the food and wine—mysterious concoctions, limbs of birds or possibly small mammals embalmed in a pinkish sauce full of globules, which on being crushed by the teeth appeared to be scented with eau-de-cologne, etc.—and there Housman sate, the chilliest convive, filled with bitter anxieties. But the dinner once over he brightened up, though always unapproachably prim. He scents disdain in every wind.

One may see Housman at any time flicking cold water over any well-meaning attempts to start a talk — his little square mouth and his strangely docked moustache give me a sense of stomach-ache.

*

Gaselee sometimes brings down experienced toppers to Magdalene. I was sitting with them in Comb. Room when some old port came in. Bower sipped and said to Ld Kintore, a merry chatty man, 'What do you make of *that*, Kintore? Pretty firm, isn't it?' K. tasted, rolled his eyes, tasted again, and said in a tone of deep conviction, 'Fat!'

Hugh Benson in his last moments praying to *Joseph*.

Points about the fire at Eton in 1901.

No representative at funeral. Warre simply excusing himself at inquest. Mrs Kindersley cheerfully talking in ruins of house. Warre censoring A.C.B.'s account in *Chronicle*. Levett and Moore were the names.

Max Beerbohm, after a fire at his house, tipped a polite inspector, who said he wasn't allowed to receive gratuities. 'Oh don't mention it,' said Max, 'regard it as a loan.'

Mark Napier calling on Ld Ribblesdale to console him when Ld R. broke his leg. 'Don't take any *half*-measures Ribblesdale. Have the d — d thing *off*. That's what *I* say.'

Henry James gave me a silent benediction at lunch. He shook hands, looked in my face with infinite solicitude, turned his eyes to heaven, and patted me many times on the shoulder. 'This my dear Arthur is a *meeting*—a *meeting*— tha's all we can predicate of it' he said, and went away.

I dreamt I was a subaltern in a very youthful army of small fat spectacled youths. We were ordered out to a turnip field to do an examination on paper blocks with stylographs. The questions were such as this: 'illustrate the diplomacy of Shakespeare.' The senior officers wore cocked hats, like a beadle's, and long sham goatee beards under their chins. A General appeared at intervals, when we all got up from the turnips, and gave out notices of which I remember only one: 'Army Order No. 67: Hardship is the privilege of *subalterns*.'

Sayle goes his way with his book and his hot meals and his nephews—like a maiden aunt; and the pattern of the little days is monotonous but gay.

Judge who had to drink several glasses of beer before attending county Bench, to bring himself down to the intellectual level of his colleagues.

Irish Stationmaster to Engine driver of passenger train, just starting. 'Hold up, Bill — mind the goods train. She may be coming any minute now.' 'Let her come, *she'll* meet her match.'

Misprint. Lord Ripon killed 200 rabbits at one shot (shoot).

Hornby and O.E. O.E. 'I was at Eton for six years and my people spent a lot of money on it, and I haven't any idea what I got out of it.' Hornby: 'Why, that's the beauty of it.'

Education is what remains when you have forgotten everything that you were taught.

Bus Cond. going on saying to a Frenchman 'Your fare is two pence.' 'Je ne comprends pas.' This goes on till Cond. says to the bus 'Can anyone tell me the French for 'You're a bloody fool.'

Man about tethering elephant in parade-ground, found, on driving peg, elephant leapt about, knocked him over, the peg torn out, elephant became quiet at once, peg had been driven into an electric main and elephant had received a shock.

Cornish farmer. 'Oh, Mr P—was a powerful preacher. I sate four pews away from the pulpit and when he got free of his text I could feel the spittle on my face.'

Nervous chemist lecturing before K. Edw. 'The oxygen and the hydrogen will now have the honour of combining before your Majesty.'

Geo Grossmith snr died. For a year after at intervals, a demand for return of Income Tax was sent him and forwarded to Grossmith jnr. At last the commissioners made their own assessment and forwarded it to G. jnr with a request for G. snr's address. G. replied 'I fear I cannot tell you my father's precise whereabouts — but I am glad to learn from an official source that he is enjoying an income far larger than he ever received in his lifetime.'

Irishman explaining a black eye — 'He spoke disrespectfully of my sister.' 'I didn't know you had a sister.' 'I haven't but it's the principle of the thing.'

Gray's lines 'Where ignorance . . . ' were naturally enough suggested by a Distant Prospect of Eton College.

'Sherry that would have the shell off an egg'.

The Baptismal service is too dramatic for most Englishmen.
(E.W.B.)

William Watson once took the greatest liberty with my house which it is possible to take—*he went mad there!*



CORNISHIANA

I do not know when it dawned upon the world that Mrs Cornish was a character of singular impressiveness, with a peculiar dignity of her own, a real touch of genius, a vivid wit, and what was best of all, a rich mine of quite unexpected and even unintentional humour, whatever she did.

A. C. BENSON



BLANCHE WARRE-CORNISH
(CIRCA 1875)

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

MRS CORNISH (1844–1922) does not appear in the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* but her conversation made her legendary in her day. Some years after her death her sayings were collected by Logan Pearsall Smith and published as *Cornishiana* in a very small private edition in 1935. Mrs Cornish's relations protested that her remarks might be construed as unkind or even ill-mannered. Pearsall Smith claimed—and with repetition almost came to believe—that his collection had been stolen and published by some unscrupulous person from whom, to avert trouble, he had bought up the whole edition. In fact his friend Robert Gathorne-Hardy had produced his pamphlet, giving Reading as the place of publication.¹

Blanche Warre-Cornish was the wife (married at eighteen) of Francis Warre-Cornish, a house-master and subsequently long-serving Vice-Provost of Eton. Her father William Ritchie, Advocate-General of Bengal, the favourite first cousin of the novelist Thackeray, died at the age of forty-five. She was related to the Stephen family and therefore to Virginia Woolf, knew Tennyson, Ruskin, Browning and George Eliot. Though she wrote two novels, it was the 'pregnant and startling irrelevancies of her conversation' which caused Logan Pearsall Smith to hail the invention of a new form of wit.

Mrs Cornish's daughter Mary (wife of the critic Desmond MacCarthy) wonderfully evokes the Vice-Provost's household in her autobiography *A Nineteenth Century*

¹ Thomas Wise's forgery of the first edition of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* ('Reading, 1847') had been exposed by John Carter and Graham Pollard in the previous year.

Childhood, but she confesses to finding her mother 'an elusive subject.' She does not completely elude A. C. Benson in *Memories and Friends* (1924), though he is warily respectful. He describes Dr Warre-Cornish's first Eton house where, as a boy of thirteen, he first encountered Blanche Warre-Cornish.

The whole aspect and furnishing of the place [Tarver's in 1875] was attractive. Morris papers and chintzes, some china, artistic pictures, a bowl of roses, readable books everywhere, but nothing *voulu* or precious about it, just a fine taste expressing itself simply: it all had an engaging air of use and comfort . . . of being infused with a charm that came from some region behind the ordinary, robust scholastic life.

Mrs Cornish was a comely and kindly hostess, unembarrassed but a little mysterious; she had much grace and distinction of air. I suppose she was hardly thirty, some years younger than her husband, but her manner was at once eager and self-possessed . . . She was animated and absent-minded by turns; and whichever she was it was somehow always a surprise. But there was no doubt that they were both somehow very different from other masters and masters' wives. There was nothing professional about them . . . They belonged to a larger sort of world, and were in touch with wider influences, both artistic and intellectual. . . .

Mrs Cornish was for some reason considered to be formidable by the boys, I think because she had a way of asking disconcerting questions, and awaiting an answer with a certain decisive emphasis, as though she expected something with a touch of brilliance. She suddenly asked me, for instance, on that occasion, before two or three school-fellows at tea, *through whose eyes I looked on nature*. I was dumb, and seeing my consternation, she prompted me by adding, after an awe-inspiring pause, 'Through Kingsley's?' . . .

I can have no doubt that Cornish saw clearly enough that his wife surprised and disconcerted boys and older people

as well—that something surprising and slightly extravagant was expected from her, and that, after a characteristic utterance, her hearers would glance at each other with that touch of amused satisfaction which indicated that they felt they had got their money's worth, and had something tangible to carry away. This he certainly saw, for he saw everything; but he also saw, as anyone did who came to know Mrs Cornish well, that her remarks were neither premeditated nor affected, but that she said exactly what came into her head . . .

[Concerning Mrs Cornish's conversion to Roman Catholicism which puzzled many people, A.C.B. quotes 'a friend']. 'She was always passionate, always anxious to conclude. She could not make a pillow of doubts. The tragic sense of life was never absent from her mind; serenity was impossible to her; she distrusted in others the serenity which is based on compromise. . . . I don't think she could conceive of certainty as something gradually distilled from experience; it had to be wrenched at a moment of insight from life, and then held by the will as a possession.'

. . . she had a great gift for improvising expedients to meet an unexpected situation, but not the power of forestalling difficulties or of systematising life. She had no settled method; she took impulsive journeys, often complicated by the fact that Bradshaw was a sealed book to her; and these extemporised excursions sometimes ended in mild disasters; as she once wrote of an expedition which had come to grief: 'We found ourselves expensively far from home, and in a snowstorm.' . . .

As she grew older, she became more and more majestic. It used to be thought and indeed often said, that Mrs Cornish had a terrifying, almost a paralysing effect in conversation. She was supposed to intend to mystify, her utterances were regarded as cryptic and oracular, decisions rather than suggestions. You were thought to be fortunate

if you could commit the verbal form to memory, but to understand the scope and drift you would have to go away and devote yourself to lonely concentration. 'I am afraid she does not think my remarks up to her standard,' I have heard an intelligent man say. But all this was an entire misreading of her character. She was critical, certainly, but more by instinct than by technical training; she had no critical method or apparatus; and she was intensely kind and sympathetic. ...

As I think of my friends, I would say of her that I have known no one of so artistic a nature and yet so totally free from the shadow of the artistic temperament.

After the 1935 edition of *Cornisbiana* a second edition, with a few corrections and additions, was printed in Cairo by the Press of the Institut français d'Archéologie orientale for Edward Gathorne-Hardy at Christmas 1947. There were only fifty-five copies. It is here reprinted.

CORNISHIANA

ONCE when some Eton boys were breakfasting at the Cloisters, Mrs Cornish said, after a long pause in the conversation, 'How sad is the fate of the carrion crow! He is mated for life.'

'Too many faces!' said Mrs Cornish at a crowded tea party in the garden. 'Won't some of them kindly go away?'

When a group were once discussing nationality in literature, 'I think,' said Mrs Cornish, 'that Henry James is a Belgian.'

Mr Dobbs was a short man with a little dark moustache, who taught mathematics. One day another master called, whom Mrs Cornish disliked.

'Wake up, wake up,' she said to the Vice-Provost, 'here is the Byronic Mr Dobbs.'

At the beginning of a dinner-party, unfolding her napkin, and before any food had appeared, Mrs Cornish said, in a loud voice, 'I must say, and I will say it. I do like my fish fresh.'

At a dull dinner-party, just after the fish had been served, Mrs Cornish, leaning across the table, asked her husband, the Vice-Provost, 'What time is it?' And then, 'To me,' she said, 'it seems like midnight.'

At another dinner, when different kinds of food were being enumerated — beef, mutton, fowls and game — Mrs Cornish, whose mind moved like a knight in chess, two squares in one direction, and then a turn round the corner, said, 'And then the fox. How delicious!'

'Tell me,' said Mrs Cornish to a young lady, 'whom would you rather have had for a lover — Shelley, Keats, or Byron?' The young lady being too shy to speak, Mrs Cornish answered her own question: 'I'd give all three of them for one wild half-hour with Rossetti.'

To an eminent mountaineer who had been singing at a party, Mrs Cornish said, 'Thank you, Sir George, so much; but you ought never to have come down from Monte Rosa.'

When someone had given a long account of the successive dynasties of ancient China, Mrs Cornish sighed and said, 'How restful, how impartial.'

'But what kept you so long,' someone asked Mrs Cornish, 'from joining the Catholic Church, when you were convinced of the truth of the doctrine?' 'The Buttercup,' she replied. 'The Buttercup is perfect without any scheme of Salvation.'

Once, when during the War, Lady Ritchie was expecting a visit from an old and shy scholar, and had given orders that no one else should be admitted, Mrs Cornish swept in, tall handsome and clothed in flowing draperies of black, and said, 'People ask me where to find comfort in these awful times. I always answer,' she continued, raising her hand aloft, 'Holy Water, Holy Water.'
[Authenticity questioned.]

Coming away from the performance of an Ibsen play, Mrs Cornish said, 'That's what I don't care for — Norwegian adultery. Now if it had a Catholic setting, how different!'

When with some dull callers the conversation lagged, 'Suppose,' said Mrs Cornish, taking up a book, 'that we all read a little.'

When someone remarked that the services at St. George's Chapel at Windsor were nice, 'Yes,' Mrs Cornish icily agreed, 'if you are an admirer of the nice.'

Once when a niece of Mrs Cornish's who had become a nun was mentioned, and a young Catholic convert remarked, 'How happy she must be to have found what she believes the way of Salvation,' Elizabeth,' said Mrs Cornish, 'you are now talking like any Protestant chit.'

On Robert Bridges coming into the room, 'Do come here, Mr Bridges,' said Mrs Cornish, 'and sit down and tell me about Palestrina.'

'Well, Mrs Cornish, the first thing I have to tell you is that Palestrina was a decadent.'

'Oh, Mr Bridges! What you say makes my very fingers shiver!'

'That fugue of Bach's,' said Mrs Cornish to a young Eton master at a musical party, 'wasn't it splendid — wasn't it like becoming a mother!'

'Good evening, Mr Gay,' said Mrs Cornish to an Eton athlete who had come to dinner, 'what a pleasure it will be to hear you talking to us again about eschatology!'

'And so you have a deep, passionate fondness for cats,' she said to another youth. He had enough presence of mind to say that he did like cats, all except those Manx ones that had no tails. 'No tails!' Mrs Cornish repeated, 'no tails! Like men! How symbolical everything is.'

Gazing at the self-portrait of a fashionable painter, 'That picture,' Mrs Cornish said, 'makes one feel — what perhaps one did not feel when one met him — what a privilege it was to meet Mr B.'

When a bore said, after a long visit to Mrs Cornish, 'Now I must tear myself away and go and see Mr Luxmoore,' she folded her hands and said, 'Oh, spare him! Spare him!'

When a cautious young man had spent a week-end at the Cloisters, Mrs Cornish, to whom caution, tepidity, want of enthusiasm, were not sympathetic, said to him at breakfast just before his departure, 'I want to tell you about a young Frenchman, who came to England, was made much of, and shown everything, and who, when he returned to Paris and was asked what he had most admired in London, answered that he had rather liked eating at a tea-party a *cold crumpet*.'

Mrs Cornish heard from Lady Bigge that Monsignor Nardi, whom she had known some years before at Rome, had been disgraced and deprived of his position. 'Indeed,' she said, 'how very interesting! I suppose it was because of his dear, delightful heterodox opinions.'

'Oh no,' said Lady Bigge sadly, 'worse than that. He has been unfrocked, I am afraid for immoral conduct.'

'Yes,' said Mrs Cornish reflectively, 'he certainly was immoral. There is no doubt of that.'

'How did you know it?' asked Lady Bigge, rather astonished.

'I remember he said to me once, 'How delightful it is, Mrs Cornish, to hear you talk about your children.' Yes, he had a great many children, but he could not talk about them.'

Mrs Cornish said to Miss Sybil Carter at an evening party, 'Sybil, I am sure you will be a very strong member of our

Beauty Society! Come to a meeting of the Beauty Society at my house on Thursday at four o'clock and we will settle the rules.'

When the time came, Miss Sybil rang and was shown in.

'How do you do, Sybil?' said Mrs Cornish. 'So charmed to see you! The meeting is over. Do you know who was there? Mr Dalton!' (who was famous for his ugly face). 'He gave some excellent hints and was of the greatest assistance to us.' Then to the Vice-Provost as he came into the room she said, 'Frank, the meeting, the meeting! Frank we must celebrate this meeting, and the Beauty Society shall go to the Opera. Nothing is more romantic than going to the Opera and returning by the South-Western Railway where you see no advertisements. Now let's go to Chapel.'

Mrs Cornish was returning late on foot one night from Windsor station to Eton with her friend, Miss Liddell, with whom she had been to London to the Opera. As they passed the Crown and Cushion, she said 'Good-night' enthusiastically to three tipsy soldiers who were standing by the door. 'Good-night, old gal, give us a kiss!' one answered, whereupon she fled down the street, followed by Miss Liddell. When constrained by want of breath to halt, she exclaimed to her companion, 'Oh, how dreadful to be so frightened! But I've never had anything like that said to me before! Now what a thing it is to be like you, a soldier's daughter and a soldier's sister! You, no doubt, must be quite used to that sort of thing, and think nothing of it.'

Miss Parratt went to South Africa to help Miss Margaret Cornish; she had a very uncomfortable journey and they had to do everything themselves, even chop their wood, in a primitive village. Miss Cornish wrote her a letter of encouragement and said, 'In all disagreeable circumstances remember the three things which I always say to myself:

'I am an Englishwoman.'

'I was born in wedlock.'

'I am on dry land.'

Mrs Cornish was discussing with Mrs Pitman the prospects of their soldier sons when a war was going on.

'Well,' said Mrs Cornish, 'let us hope that both our boys will be ordered to the front at once.'

'Surely, Mrs Cornish,' answered Mrs Pitman, looking much shocked, 'you don't mean what you say?'

'Why, my dear Mrs Pitman,' said Mrs Cornish, 'you see, war is much less dangerous than polo.'

On being received at Captain Noble's, at Nunnykirk, Mrs Cornish exclaimed enthusiastically, 'This is wonderful! When I am in the South I see men, but here I see *Vikings!*'

On leaving a party of children at tea, Mrs Cornish said, 'That's right, children, munch and crunch.'

One day Tagore was being discussed, and Mrs Cornish said: 'But of course, he cannot understand Christianity; Christianity — so complex and so ironical.'

At a tongue-tied dinner, A. C. Benson talked volubly to save the situation, telling stories and uttering platitudes and contesting statements. Later in the evening when alone with her in a corner of the drawing-room, Mrs Cornish, who had seemed abstracted in a remote dream during the dinner, fixed her penetrating glance upon him and said gaily, 'What a pity it is that you are only a *tête-a-tête* talker!'

Meeting in the streets of Windsor one soaking day a party of half-drenched people who were going sadly on a water-

party, 'Ah!' said Mrs Cornish, 'the river is the best place on a day like this; there are no puddles!'

Once a party of guests came into tea, wet from the rain on the river. 'Don't change your things,' Mrs Cornish said, 'but just take off everything.'

A relative, who had returned from a long foreign tour, talked the whole evening of his journey and then began the next morning; Mrs Cornish absented herself after breakfast and returned with a packet of sermon paper, which she put into the hands of the speaker, and said urgently and enthusiastically, 'This is too good to be lost; you must write it all down — every word!'

An American who was staying at the Cloisters for the Fourth of June was taken by Mrs Cornish to the Provost's Lodge to see a great display of gold cups on the dining table. After a moment Mrs Cornish drew him away, saying, 'This is not the occasion, but I could come here by myself and weep my eyes out over these cups.' Whether it was the ugliness of the cups, or the display of gold which she could weep over is disputed by the experts, but the best opinion inclines to the latter conclusion.

Once at Miss Liddell's, Mrs Cornish, as she gazed at her hostess's big dog called Joe (after Joachim), said, 'I wish that all men could be dogs and all women birds.' Sir Walter Parratt, who was present, said, 'You will remember, Mrs Cornish, that cock birds always have the best plumage.' She merely shook her head slowly and said 'Yes.'

Mrs Cornish was in the train at the time of the railway collision at Slough, travelling in a first-class compartment on a second-class ticket, for the train was full of people from the

races — otherwise, as she drew the moral, she might have been killed. Arthur Coleridge, who was in the compartment with her, collapsed in terror and crawled under a seat. A friend hurried to Mr Coleridge to find out what Mrs Cornish had said on this occasion, but was told that she (who was always mistress of the situation in any crisis) had only remarked, 'Mr Coleridge, get up at once!' 'What,' he asked, 'had you expected her to say?' 'Anna Karenina, at least,' the disappointed enquirer answered. The account Mrs Cornish gave herself was as follows (according to Mr Fuller-Maitland): 'I said to myself, 'I shall be killed, but Charlotte shall be married — get up, Mr Coleridge! — I shall be killed, but Charlotte — get up, Mr Coleridge — shall be married.' I then looked up and saw all the Windsor people, with their innocent racing faces, looking in at the window.'

After a visit to Mrs Benson, as her hostess, in saying good-bye remarked, 'I wish I were saying 'Hail!' 'But,' said Mrs Cornish, 'what a richness there is in the word 'Good-bye!'

Once at a London party, the beautiful, sibylline Mrs Leslie Stephen was established in a small room apart, and guests were led in one by one to her presence. Mrs Cornish looked in on one of these sacred audiences, and as she moved impatiently away was heard to exclaim, 'Such a kill-joy!'

When a young lady, who had been to France to finish her education, ended a French recital, Mrs Cornish said, 'How wise you are not to attempt the French accent!'

Mrs Cornish, meeting an Eton friend in a Paris restaurant, described how she had been to St. Roch and had heard a service for all the poor children in Paris. 'There they were,' she said, 'all singing with their innocent bass voices.'

The day her novel *Alcestis* was published, Mrs Cornish was lunching at Cambridge, and embarrassed an undergraduate by announcing, 'My baby was born this morning.'

Mrs Cornish stood with her daughter talking to an Eton boy, to whom she said, 'You were on the river this afternoon? Now, tell me, was the Castle looking historic or romantic?' The much embarrassed boy hummed and hesitated and then took the plunge and said, 'Er—er—romantic, I should say.'

'Dorothy, Dorothy,' cried Mrs Cornish to her daughter, 'didn't I say we ought to have gone on the river this afternoon to see the Castle looking romantic?'

Mrs Montgomery was at an evening party at the Grafton Gallery and Mrs Cornish said something (now forgotten) to her and then, a little later, swept up to her across the room and asked piercingly, 'I fear you thought me *commonplace*?'

Once when Mrs Cornish was sitting with boring visitors at tea, she jumped up suddenly, saying, 'I am now going to be rowed on the river by a Catholic Unemployed.'

After one of her long pauses of musing and recollection, Mrs Cornish remarked, 'One of the regrets of my life is that I have never had a French lover. One of the kind, you know, who squeezes his knee against yours under a table. I have seen them do it.'

When there was a scandal of the usual sort at Eton, and her younger daughter expressed shocked feelings, 'Don't be a prig!' Mrs Cornish answered. 'It's the traditional, ancient, aristocratic vice of Eton. What do they know of it in those modern, sanitary, linoleum schools?'

Once Mrs Cornish asked an Eton boy who had been for a walk, 'Now, tell me, what did you see?'

'Well,' the boy answered, 'I don't think I saw anything.'

'What!' Mrs Cornish exclaimed in astonishment, 'not even a bee?'

When she had been in a crowded railway station Mrs Cornish agreed on being asked whether the crowd wasn't awful, and said, 'Yes; but if only people would manage their expressions!'

To one of her daughters who was talking of what occupation or profession she meant to adopt, Mrs Cornish said, 'I fear all you can do is to grow up into an English lady, doing one thing at one time, and one at another.'

(PROBABLY APOCRYPHAL)

When Tennyson was once reading *Maud* at the Cloisters :

*Birds in the high Hall garden
When twilight was falling.
Maud, Maud, Maud,
They were crying and calling.*

he chanted.

'What birds were they, Mr Tennyson?' asked Mrs Cornish. 'Nightingales?'

'Rooks, woman, rooks!' cried the poet.

ADDITIONS BY LOGAN PEARSALL SMITH

'Writing is as easy as breathing to the Bensons. It's wonderful; but how one does hate to be breathed on.'

At the opening of the Catholic chapel at Eton by the attractive and gentle Lord Braye : 'Isn't it nice to look at that Bishop and know he isn't married?'

Mrs Cornish asked Lytton Strachey to meet ***** to talk about Queen Victoria. Neither would speak of her. 'It left me pirouetting.'

Shortly after Sir Galahad had been hung in Chapel (about 1897) Mrs Cornish led a girl who was staying with her up the aisle and planted her before the picture. Long silence. Then Mrs Cornish: 'Frank sees immortality in the horsse.' No other comment.

Dorothy Cornish had been on approval to play the piano to Herbert Spencer in the afternoon. At luncheon Mrs Cornish said: 'Dorothy! tell us, what does Herbert Spencer look like — in beddd?'

'Let there be cocoa!'

ADDITIONS FROM 'A NUMBER OF PEOPLE'

BY SIR EDWARD MARSH (1939)

'Shocking, her B!' was all she said as she passed me in the exit from St. James's Hall after some not too good singing.

I was once her escort on the river at Henley Regatta, I rowing and she steering. Mrs Cornish sat brooding over the ropes:

*on some great charge imploy'd
she seemed, or fixt in cogitation deep —*

from which in sudden perception of danger she would erupt with urgent cries of 'Ship, Mr Marsh, ship, ship, if you please!'

Meeting Miss Katharine Horner on her return from a visit to Eton, I asked her if Mrs Cornish had said anything characteristic, and she answered: 'No, I don't think so,' and then:

'Oh, yes, there was something, what can it have been? She fished it up: Mrs Cornish had raised her head from one of her brown studies and ejaculated: 'Kipps — not by Kipling: Kim — not by Joachim.

CORNISHIANA II

55 copies of the pamphlet
were printed at Kirkwall in 1948

From an Ambassadorial Source

In a country lane, on a cow putting its head over the hedge —
'The oxx — how different from the foxx.'

Out of the blue — 'There are many baronets among bathchair men.'

The next one is second-hand from my mother :

She had taken my eldest brother, who had just got into the Eton XI as a boy of seventeen, to see Mrs Cornish. Mrs Cornish, after a brief contemplation said, 'Wagner — what force!'

First hand — My mother took me to see Mrs Cornish one summer, and we were told we should find her in the garden. We saw her under the cross-over of a pergola sparsely overgrown with roses, sitting down reading to the Secretary of the Norwegian Legation — known to be stone blind — who was sitting very erect beside her. On seeing my mother hesitate slightly in her advance, Mrs Cornish said, 'Come on my dear, come on. I am reading 'The Hound' to this poor blind man.' When my mother showed slight embarrassment and surprise, she said, 'It's quite all right my dear, it's quite all right, he is totally blind — he cannot hear a word I say.'

From an old Etonian source.

When several of the young Stones were at tea with Mrs Cornish, she suddenly said to one of them — ‘Maggie, are you sentimental? Do you love the moon?’

‘Beethoven,’ she said one day, ‘how baffling!’

‘Don’t you wish all men were palimpsests?’

Meeting David Furse in School Yard, she said, ‘You have been confirmed?’

‘Yes, Mrs Cornish.’

‘I knew it. I knew it as soon as I saw you under the arch.’

One of her daughters lost her purse when the Cornishes were out paying a call. As they left, she asked her mother whether she had seen it anywhere. ‘Yes, Margaret,’ she replied, ‘I did. I think I rather pushed it behind a pot.’

FROM ARTHUR JAMES’S BLACK NOTEBOOK
(‘BOOK OF STORIES, &C.’ 1891)

Sir C. Ross.

Mrs Cornish was entertaining some distinguished friends one afternoon with her well-known hospitality and affability. The tea had been brought, but the absence of the bread and butter was remarked by the hostess, who rang the bell. Presently a tall footman appeared and in answer to the expected order said, ‘Please mum I can’t bring it: there’s Sir Charles in the pantry mum, and as fast as ever I cuts up the bread and butter Sir Charles he keeps on heatin’ it hup.’

Shah Cornish aged [omitted] said at Christmas. 'Mummy, what a lot of *Fathers* we have got. There's God, there's Father Christmas, and there's our Father here.'

Mrs Cornish was wishing for a drive one uncertain April day, and a fly had been vaguely ordered from Lipscomb who lived some way off. A footman appeared and announced to his mistress, who was then absorbed in literary work, that Mr Lipscomb had sent to ask 'for what [o'clock] she would order the Kerridge.' 'Oh, don't trouble me now,' was the reply: 'between the showers.'

I was calling at the Cornishes in November 1898, when we had been discussing the new Houses at Eton, which had been built so expensively and placed so inconveniently that no one would take them, while their proximity drove W. Durnford to leave Eton. I then rose, explaining that I was going to see the Bursar upon business of my own. Mrs Cornish who had been entering items in a large vellum book, said 'Don't go! *This* is the Bursary — *I'm* the Bursar. All the College business falls on me.' 'Indeed?' I said, 'That makes it much more unaccountable that it should be so unsuccessfully managed.'

When my daughter Celia was about to be married to Saxton Noble, Miss Lilius Noble, his sister, was at Mrs Cornish's discussing various details referring to her married life at Jesmond. Mrs Cornish in the course of this conversation said to Miss Noble, 'Now, mind you don't spoil Celia. Don't be too kind to her or try to direct her. Throw her into the water and let her swim! They can all do it. When my sister Gussie was married to Mr Freshfield, she was entirely ignorant of household matters and of all commonplace things. But before she had been married three weeks she never *dreamed* of giving her husband salmon or turbot for dinner, if there was mackerel or sole to be had.'

On the evening of July 2nd 1898 Mrs Cornish gave a musical party. When the time for separation approached Miss Lushington took leave of her. Mrs Cornish said 'Must you *really* go? How sad! Mr MacNaghton! Miss Lushington has just been obliged to go, a charming friend of Margaret's! And you know her! And you had no opportunity of speaking to her! How sad. She has gone to her Father, and a hundred other things. Let us go and give her a cheer.' So as the fly drove away a feeble clapping of hands was raised from the balcony.

F. W. Cornish on receiving a telegram from me inquiring whether he had room for a boy whom I was unable to take, and ending with my address, 'Overcombe, Liss', replied to me 'My Lord, I am sorry I have not a vacancy next half for your son: but Mr Arthur James will be able to give you any assistance.'

To the Lord Overcombe, Liss.





Stone Brough Books